

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 EA-07 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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AMCONSUL HONG KONG
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
USLO PEKING
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 16825

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, BD

SUBJ: SOVIET VIEWS ON BANGLADESH

1. SUMMARY. POLITICAL COUNSELOR CALLED ON YURIY FILIPOV, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE SOVIET MFA'S SOUTH ASIA DIVISION, TO DISCUSS RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH. FILIPOV NOTED PRESIDENT SAYEM'S COMMITMENT TO NON-ALIGNMENT AND TO DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, BUT SAID REPEATEDLY THAT THE SITUATION WAS VERY UNCLEAR AND "VERY SHAKY." HE WAS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DISORDER IN THE ARMED SERVICES WHICH HE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY (NSP). THIS GROUP, HE SAID, WAS "VERY PRO-PEKING." HE SAW NO IMPROVEMENT IN THE SITUATION IN THE LAST FEW DAYS AND SAID THAT THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES IN FACT SEEMED TO BE LOSING CONTROL.

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HE SAID THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY CONTACTING SOME

OF THEIR PERSONNEL OUTSIDE OF DACCA (WHICH NUMBER AROUND 200), INCLUDING SEVERAL GEOLOGISTS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN IN CONTACT SINCE NOVEMBER 8. MOSCOW WAS GOING AHEAD WITH ITS ECONOMIC RELATIONS (AID AND TRADE) BUT ALL OF THESE EFFORTS, AS WELL AS THOSE BY OTHER COUNTRIES, WERE "NOT SIGNIFICANT AT ALL" GIVEN THE MAGNITUDE OF BANGLADESH'S PROBLEMS. HE DISMISSED ALLEGATIONS OF INDIAN INVOLVEMENT AS "NOT LIKELY" BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS HAD REVEALED STRONG ANTI-INDIAN SENTIMENTS AND SOME ANTI-SOVIET FEELINGS. HE SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE CAUSES OF THE COUP AGAINST MUJIB AND THE MORE RECENT TROUBLES HAD BEEN "PERSONAL RIVALRIES," NOT POLITICAL ISSUES. HIS COMMENTS ON MOSHTAQUE AHMED WERE SURPRISINGLY POSITIVE, AND HE EXPECTED MOSHTAQUE TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN RESTORING ORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER EXCHANGES OF PLEASANTRIES, FILIPOV TURNED DIRECTLY TO THE BANGLADESH SITUATION SAYING THAT IT WAS "VERY SHAKY" AND THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW THE SITUATION WOULD EVOLVE. THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO DACCA HAD CALLED ON PRESIDENT SAYEM ON NOVEMBER 17 AT SAYEM'S INITIATIVE, SAID FILIPOV. THE PURPOSE OF THE CALL WAS PURELY PROTOCOLARY, AND THE CONVERSATION WAS SHORT, 15 TO 20 MINUTES, WITH THE PRESIDENT DOING MOST OF THE TALKING. SAYEM HAD ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WANTED TO SEE RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION CONTINUED AND EXPANDED, AND HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT BANGLADESH'S FOREIGN POLICY WILL FOLLOW "PREVIOUS LINES," INCLUDING CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO NON-ALIGNMENT. THIS IS THE ONLY OFFICIAL WORD WHICH MOSCOW HAS HAD ON THE VIEWS OF THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP. FILIPOV EMPHASIZED THAT ALL ELSE IS SPECULATION ON HIS PART, BASED ON PRESS SOURCES AND ON THE SOMEWHAT CONFUSING REPORTING OF SOVIET OFFICIALS IN DACCA.

3. THE SOVIETS IN DACCA HAVE REPORTED "A GREAT DEAL OF DISTURBANCES," SAID FILIPOV. THE EMBASSY HAS HAD SOME DIFFICULTIES CONTACTING SOVIET NATIONALS LOCATED OUTSIDE OF DACCA AND "THIS IS A DISTURBING DEVELOPMENT," HE SAID. THREE OR FOUR GEOLOGISTS WORKING IN THE AREA BETWEEN DACCA AND CHITTAGONG WERE LAST HEARD FROM ON NOVEMBER 8. SINCE THEN TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION HAS BEEN DISRUPTED IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. THE SOVIET CONSUL IN CHITTAGONG IS IN CONTACT WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE EMBASSY BUT HAS ALSO HAD SOME PROBLEMS REACHING SOVIET SPECIALISTS WORKING IN SOUTHERN BANGLADESH.

4. THE SITUATION HAS DETERIORATED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE THE DECISION ON NOVEMBER 7 TO RELEASE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS, SAID FILIPOV. AMONG THOSE RELEASED WERE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY (NSP) WHICH HAS BECOME VERY ACTIVE, ESPECIALLY IN THE ARMED FORCES. FILIPOV SAID THAT THE NSP IS

"VERY PRO-PEKING" AND HAS PROMOTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF "REVOLUTINARY COMMITTEES" WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. THIS PARTY, HE EXPLAINED, HAD GROWN OUT OF THE YOUTH GROUP OF THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY AND INCLUDED MANY YOUNG EXTREME LEFTISTS. THE NSP'S APPEAL IN THE ARMY SEEMS TO BE MAINLY AT THE LOWER LEVELS. IT HAS LITTLE INFLUENCE IN THE OFFICER CORPS AND NONE IN THE HIGH COMMAND.

5. THE NSP WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE COUP AGAINST MUJIB OR IN THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 3, SAID FILIPOV. BOTH EVENTS WERE SET OFF BY "PERSONAL RIVALRY," HE SAID, AND ADDED THAT "WE HAVE NOT HEARD THE END OF THIS YET." HE DESCRIBED ALLEGATIONS OF INTENSE ANTIPATHY BETWEEN GENERALS MOSHARAF AND ZIAUR RAHMAN AND SAID THEY HAD NOT BEEN ON SPEAKING TERMS. THE SITUATION, HE REITERATED, IS VERY UNCLEAR AND ONE CANNOT SEE WHAT IS COMING NEXT. THE LEADERSHIP SEEMS TO BE LOSING CONTROL. THE FOUR GENERALS OF THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION HAVE TAKEN OVER ALL OF THE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THEY KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT ADMINISTERING THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT.

6. ASKED TO COMMENT ON THOSE INDIVIDUALS OR FORCES WHICH ARE LIKELY TO EMERGE FROM THE PRESENT SITUATION, HE MENTIONED GENERAL ASMAN AS AT LEAST ONE POSSIBILITY WHO HAD NOT, AS FAR AS FILIPOV WAS AWARE, BEEN HEARD FROM RECENTLY. ASMAN HAD BEEN MOSHTAQUE'S CHIEF MILITARY ADVISOR, HE SAID, BUT HAD STEPPED DOWN BEFORE THE MOSHARAF-ZIA PROBLEMS HAD ERUPTED. FORMER PRESIDENT MOSHTAQUE, HE SAID, SEEMED TO BE STILL OPERATING "BEHIND THE SCENES" TO TRY TO SORT THINGS OUT AND HE WOULD VERY LIKELY BE HEARD FROM AGAIN BEFORE LONG. THE QUESTION NOW IS THE CAPABILITY OF THE BANGLADESH LEADERSHIP TO RETORE ORDER. THE GOVERNMENT OF MOSHTAQUE AHMED HAD MOVED SLOWLY BUT STEADILY TOWARD THE RESTORATION OF ORDER AND AUTHORITY FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW OF MUJIB.

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7. FILIPOV DISMISSED PRESS REPORTS OF POSSIBLE OVERT INDIAN INVOLVEMENT IN RECENT EVENTS AS "NOT LIKELY." INDIA WOULD HAVE NO INTEREST IN CAUSING FUTHER DISORDER, HE COMMENTED. AS TO WHETHER MOCOW THOUGHT INDIA MIGHT INTERVENE UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTACES, FILIPOV ANSWERED, "THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION. WE HAVE NOTHING ON THAT." THE SITUATION IS TENSE, HE REITERATED, AND THERE IS CONCERN ABOUT THE SAFETY OF FOREIGNERS, PARTICULARLY DIPLOMATS. HE NOTED THAT THUS FAR HE KNEW OF NO CASES WHERE FOREIGNERS HAD BEEN INJURED, BUT HE MENTIONED THE GRENADES FOUND ON THE PREMISES OF THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION.

8. HE SAID THAT ANTI-INDIAN SENTIMENT HAS BEEN STRONGER THAN HE ANTICIPATED. SEVERAL BIG DEMONSTRATIONS HAD A PRO- NOUNCED ANTI-INDIAN CAST, AND THE REACTION AGAINST GENERAL MOSHARAF HAD A SHARPLY ANTI-INDIAN TONE. THESE FEELINGS, HE CONFIDENTIAL

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SAID, HAD BEEN THERE TO SOME EXTENT SINCE THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE, ESPECIALLY IN MILITARY CIRCLES. ONE BENGALI COMMENTATOR HAD SAID THAT BENGALIS SEEMED TO NEED AN EXTERNAL FOE, AND THAT AFTER 1971 INDIA HAD REPLACED WEST PAKISTAN IN THAT ROLE. ANOTHER POSSIBLE REASON FOR ANTI-INDIAN SENTIMENT, HE SAID, WAS THAT THE INDIANS HAD REPORTEDLY TAKEN QUITE A LOT OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM BANGLADESH AT THE TIME OF LIBERATION AS "WAR TROPHIES." THIS STORY MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUE, BUT IT

IS AT LEAST WIDELY BELIEVED IN BENGALI MILITARY CIRCLES. THE BANGLADESH ARMY, HE SAID, IS VERY SMALL, 30,000 TO 35,000, AND THERE HAD LONG BEEN TENSIONS BETWEEN MUJIB AND THE MILITARY OVER THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES AND THE ROLE OF THE ARMY. SOME ANTI-SOVIET MANIFESTATIONS HAD ALSO SURFACED DURING THE CURRENT TROUBLES. THE JOURNAL "HOLIDAY, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD CARRIED MANY ANTI-SOVIET REMARKS, FILIPOV SAID. THE EDITOR OF "HOLIDAY" WAS ALSO THE EDITOR OF THE BANGLADESH TIMES, KHAN, WHO IS KNOWN FOR HIS ANTI-SOVIET VIEWS, ACCORDING TO FILIPOV.

9. SOVIET-BANGLADESH ECONOMIC RELATIONS CONTINUE UNCHANGED, HE SAID. NONE OF THE 200 OR SO SOVIET SPECIALISTS WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING IN BANGLADESH, MOSTLY IN THE SOUTH, HAD BEEN RECALLED. MUCH OF THE SOVIET AID ACTIVITY, SAID FILIPOV, HAD BEEN A CONTINUATION FROM COMMITMENTS EARLIER MADE TO EAST PAKISTAN. AMONG THE SOVIET PROJECTS ARE A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM, AN ELECTRICAL MACHINERY FACTORY, A THERMAL POWER STATION, AID IN THE FISHERIES INDUSTRY, AND TWO OR THREE TEAMS CONSISTING OF 20 TO 25 GEOLOGISTS. THE SOVIETS HAVE NO PROGRAMS IN AGRICULTURE. THE CHITTAGONG HARBOR PROJECT, WHICH WAS COMPLETED IN MID-1974, HAS BEEN THE MAJOR AID ITEM THUS FAR FROM THE SOVIET UNION, HE SAID. THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE BILATERAL TRADE--MOSCOW BUYS JUTE--BUT IT DOES NOT AMOUNT TO MUCH. MOSCOW HAS PROVIDED SOME HELP FOR INTERNAL AIR TRANSPORT, PARTICULARLY HELICOPTERS, AND IT HAS PROVIDED TRAINING FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL INCLUDING TRAINING FOR A FEW HUNDRED BENGALIS IN THE SOVIET UNION. NONE OF THESE PROGRAMS WERE INTERRUPTED BY THE AUG 15 COUP; THERE WERE NO DISRUPTIONS OR VARIATIONS IN SOVIET ACTIVITIES, FILIPOV SAID. THE BENGALIS ALSO WANT AID IN FLOOD CONTROL, BOTH FROM THE SEA AND FROM THE RIVERS, HE SAID. THIS IS VIRTUALLY AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK, BUT MOSCOW IS SPONSORING RESEARCH ON THE

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PROBLEM. TO BE EFFECTIVE, IT WOULD REQUIRE A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EFFORT RUNNING INTO BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, HE SAID. THUS FAR ALL OF THE SOVIET EFFORTS IN ECONOMIC AID, AS WELL AS THOSE BY OTHER COUNTRIES, ARE "NOT SIGNIFICANT AT ALL" IN VIEW OF THE ENORMITY OF BANGLADESH'S NEEDS AND PROBLEMS.

10. PERSONAL AND BIO NOTE: FILIPOV WAS VERY CORDIAL AND ASKED THAT HIS PERSONAL GREETING BE CONVEYED TO AMBASSADOR BOSTER, WHO HE HAD KNOWN IN WASHINGTON IN THE LATE 50'S. FILIPOV SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN A COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS IN THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON IN 1958-62, THAT HE HAD THEN COME BACK TO WORK ON VIETNAM AFFAIRS IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION BUT HAD FOUND THE SITUATION THERE AN "IMPOSSIBLE ONE." HE SAID THAT THE SOUTH ASIA DIVISION IS PRESENTLY HEADED BY MR. SUDARIKOV AND THAT THERE ARE FOUR SECTORS UNDER HIM - ONE FOR

PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH, HEADED BY HIM (FILIPOV); ONE ON INDIA HEADED BY BOLDYREV; ONE ON SRI LANKA, BURMA AND NEPAL, HEADED BY STEPANOV; AND ONE ON THE OTHER SMALL COUNTRIES OF THE REGION, WHOSE HEAD HE DID NOT NAME.

11. COMMENT: FILIPOV SEEMED VERY FRANK AND FORTHCOMING AND GENUINELY ANXIOUS TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON BANGLADESH. HE SHOWED OBVIOUS CONCERN ABOUT THE CURRENT DISORDERS AND ABOUT POSSIBLE DANGERS TO FOREIGNERS. HIS COMMENTS ON MOSHTAQUE AHMED WERE SURPRISINGLY POSITIVE, IN VIEW OF THE COMPARATIVELY RESERVED POSITION THE SOVIET PRESS TOOK TOWARD HIS REGIME. PERHAPS THE EVENTS SINCE NOVEMBER 3, AND PARTICULARLY THE INCREASED ACTIVITY OF THE NSP, HAVE DEMONSTRATED TO THE SOVIETS THAT MOSHTAQUE'S LEADERSHIP WAS CLEARLY PREFERABLE TO ITS AFTERMATH.

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